

# John 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] So I am a great fan in my final cabinet on my computer of Christmas sermons.! And each year I kind of open them up in the last week of November and begin to look.

! Yeah, they're not great, there's lots of them. And I want to try and really look at, to try and look freshly at John 1.

So I've tried to prepare this, apart from any commentaries. So I don't think any of this is heretical. It's fresh to me. I hope it'll be fresh to you.

I really want to speak from one verse and kind of expand out from there. So it's John 1 verse 14. Here's this mind-bending verse, And the Word became flesh, and dwelt on my flesh, and we have seen His glory.

And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling amongst us, and we have seen His glory.

That's what we are going to be celebrating over these next number of weeks.

[ 1 : 03 ] The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. And the name of that Word who became flesh, John will tell us, is Jesus.

Jesus is the Word of God who became flesh and made His dwelling among us. Let's unpack this statement and think about this. So the first point is from verse 1, and that is that He was in the beginning.

In the beginning was the Word. There's an enormous interest, isn't there, in origins. So the TV programme, Who Do You Think You Are? You go into one of the bookshops, you go into

Waterstones in Ealing, and you'll find shelves and shelves of books on how things began.

What was there before the Big Bang, that sort of thing. John tells us, doesn't he, that the Word was there at the beginning. At the beginning, the Word was already there.

And so if you want to know what was there before creation, John tells us the Word was there before creation. What do you think of when you think of words? What do you think of when you think of words?

[ 2 : 15 ] I think of meaning. Words mean something. We have dictionaries, don't we? Or at least we used to. And a dictionary tells us the meaning of words.

Thousands and thousands of words. And every word has a meaning. Words matter. And so what was there at the beginning? There was the Word, says John.

There was meaning. It's a really popular view of the universe today, that it is completely meaningless. That it arose out of chaos, completely by chance.

It might never have happened, but it did. It arose out of chaos, and it will end in chaos. And our lives, our little lives, are part of this chaotic, meaningless affair.

But John says no. John says no. In the beginning there was meaning. In the beginning was the Word, and words mean something. He doesn't say in the beginning, and there was God, and there goes.

[ 3 : 18 ] He says in the beginning was the Word. There is meaning behind the universe. And before the universe, this universe has meaning.

In the beginning was the Word. What else do we think of when we think of words? We don't have meaning. We also think of personality. Things don't speak.

Although, we have to say, when you kind of ring up a company, you often find when you speak on the phone, you're trying to ring the gas company or the electric company.

You're speaking to a thing, aren't you? What's that like? What's that like? You're speaking to a kind of voice that comes back to you.

It's not a human voice. But even that thing which you speak to, which is so frustrating when you ring the gas board, all the electricity, it's been programmed to speak, hasn't it?

[ 4 : 15 ] Things don't speak. People, persons, speak. And so what was there at the beginning? Nothing. It's impossible. Because something can't come from nothing, can it? So there's always been something. There's never been nothing. There's always been something. And what is the something that's always been there? Well, was it a chemical reaction? And was it a mathematical formula? No, before and behind the physics and the chemistry and the maths, there was the word, it says John. There was personhood. And there was personality. And so someone like Richard Dawkins, he wants to argue, doesn't he, that somehow the impersonal has given rise to the personal. But John says, no, that could never have happened. It would never have happened. No, John says, you see, it was a person that gave rise to persons.

[ 5 : 24 ] In the beginning was the word. Things don't speak. In the beginning there was meaning. In the beginning there was a person. And so if you want to grasp the universe in which you live, if you want to grasp the centre of the universe, you have to hear and respond to this word.

You have to know this person. And you have to have a relationship with this person. And if you want to grasp the meaning of the universe, it's not a question of knowing the right mathematical formula. It's not a question of being able to analyse the chemistry. It's a question of knowing a person. Because in the beginning was the word. The third thing that I think of when we think of the word or words is communication.

And words have meaning, don't they? Words are spoken by persons in order to communicate with one another. Words are bridges from one mind to other minds.

Hopefully that is what is going on now, isn't it? That the words I speak are a bridge from my mind hopefully into your mind. As though from your faces you wouldn't know.

[ 6 : 45 ] And hopefully my words are coming to you and are bridging the gap between you and you. That's what words do. If we want someone else to know what we're thinking what do we do?

Children, what do we do? If we want someone else to know what we're thinking what do we do? What do we do? That's right.

That's right. We do, don't we? We tell them. We speak. Words bridge the gap. If we want to make ourselves known to someone else we speak, we use words.

Without words we wouldn't be able to know each other. At all. What a bleak world it would be if it was a wordless world. And that is unless you speak to me I can't know you.

I could analyse you. I probably couldn't. But I've tried. I could get someone to analyse you chemically, couldn't I? I could get someone to plot your genome system and your DNA.

[ 7 : 51 ] We could get you a CT scan of your body. We could record in some scientific way the workings of your brain. But I still wouldn't know you would I? I wouldn't know you unless you spoke to me.

And words are wonderful things, aren't they? Absolutely wonderful things. And so some of you are separated from your family by thousands of miles but you can speak to each other on the phone. You can email one another. You know what it's like on Skype or FaceTime my mother. It's not brilliant on the technology front.

But when you can see them but you can't hear them it's so frustrating isn't it? Or she can hear you and you can't hear her. And so we can speak to people who are separated by a thousand miles whereas people who live maybe next door or even in the same house if they're not speaking and there's no communication we don't know each other at all.

because what wonderful things words are. What was there before creation? In the beginning what was there? In the beginning John says the word was there was meaning there was personality and there was communication.

[ 9 : 09 ] These are the essence of reality. There was a speaking God. A God who doesn't keep himself to himself. A God who wants to be known.

A God who wants to make himself known. And John says that Jesus is that word of God. And Jesus is God revealing himself.

Jesus is God making himself known. Jesus is the word of God. The next thing we learn about the word is that the word was can you see it?

With God. This one and the word was God. He was with God. It implies doesn't it? A closeness to God. It implies a very close relationship.

It means something like this he was face to face with God. He was besides God. There was nothing else to be with God but the word was there with God.

[10:12] And Jesus is the one who has always been there with God in perfect fellowship with God. And so you go later on in John 17 and the Lord Jesus prays and before he gives himself to die and he says he asks his father to give him the glory that he had before the world began.

He was always there with God. And John goes a step further and he says he was with God and he was God. And that's the only way you can translate that statement. John begins and ends his gospel with the statement about the deity of Jesus Christ.

John 1 verse 1 says he was God. Towards the end of the gospel after the resurrection Thomas falls down before the risen Jesus and says to him my Lord and my God.

And Jesus to John is the word and the word is God. He was with God and he was God and I can't understand that. I can just adore it can't I?

And I can wonder at it. And when the gospel witnesses come around your door and they say to you how can you understand that? How can you explain that?

[11:32] What do you say? You say I can't. You say I'm sorry I can't. But what would you expect of God? I can't even understand myself.

I can't understand how they are meaning. Completely the universe what would you expect from the God who created the whole thing? Would you expect to understand it?

The word was with God and the word was God. He shared one divine nature. The third thing we learnt from this passage is that the word was the creator of all things.

I love verse 3. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. Far from being something that God has created like Jehovah Witnesses believe, J.W.S. believes that Jesus was the first created being. He was the greatest being, the highest being, the most wonderful of all beings but he was the first created being. He's a created being, he's just a top angel.

[12:44] But John says no, he was never created. The word is not part of creation. Everything that has been made was made through him and so think right now, think of all that's been made, if it was made, if it was created.

It was created through him and by him. And so he isn't created and he isn't part of creation. There are two levels of reality.

There are only two levels of reality. There is the eternal uncreated reality and there is the created finite reality. And the word belongs to the former, not the latter.

He belongs to the eternal uncreated reality, not to the created finite reality. Jesus is the creator of the universe. And what that means is that this universe is his, every atom is his.

And he is sovereign over all of it and he rules over it. And so that means that we as Christians have nothing to fear. It's Jesus Christ the universe and he made it.

[14:00] It also means that creation should be enjoyed. And it should be cared for. By Christians of all people. Because when we enjoy, when we care for creation, we are enjoying and caring for what belongs to our Saviour Jesus Christ.

So when we're caring for creation, when we're enjoying creation, we're not doing something other than our Christian faith. It's part of our Christian faith. So enjoy your walking. Don't drop litter.

Enjoy the sunsets, the hills, the lakes, the sea, Jesus made them. They belong to Jesus. And if you're a Christian, you have a duty to enjoy creation.

It's like afterwards. The fourth thing about the word is that he is the source and the giver of life and light. Can you see that verse 4? in him was life and the life was the light of man.

He's the source of life and light. Two words that are very common in John's gospel. He's going to explore them.

[15:13] You can trace the themes right the way through the gospel. So without a word from God, all is death and darkness. darkness. What was life like before Genesis 1 in the beginning?

Death and darkness and then God spoke. And when God spoke there was light. And eventually there was life. All light and all life come from the word of God.

And that goes for spiritual light and light as well. Jesus is the source of spiritual light and life. And in John's gospel you find him saying things like this. If you believe in me, you will have eternal life.

If you follow me, death cannot touch you. I am the resurrection and the life. And so you see him raising Lazarus from the dead. And he says, I am the light of the world. I come into the world to

bring light and you see him giving light to a blind man from birth.

All is darkness and death apart from Jesus Christ. And if you don't know Jesus, it is darkness and death without Jesus. So the word was in the beginning and the word was with God and the word was God and the word is the creator of all things.

[16:34] He was never created and the word is the source and the giver of all light and life. And then back to our verse in verse 14. John says, and the word became flesh and dwelt to mass.

The tenses of the verse in chapter 1 are really, really important. And we've seen what the word is, what the word always was. In the beginning was the word.

The word was in the beginning. Now we see this. We say that the word became. There was one particular point in history when the word who always was became.

There's a point in history where the word who always was became what he wasn't. What he had not been.

The word became flesh. Without ceasing to be what he was, he became what he was not. There was a point in history where the eternal everlasting word became what he'd not been before.

[17:55] And it wasn't by discarding his deity. It wasn't by getting rid of his godness. God can't cease to be God. He never ceased to be what he was God, but he took and he assumed something that he was not.

He took flesh. He became flesh. And John chooses that word really very carefully. He doesn't say he became human.

He doesn't even say that he took a body. He became flesh. And the word flesh in the Bible has got all types of meanings. It's a really rich word. It can mean meat. It can mean body tissue.

The stuff your body is made of. It can mean that and it does mean that of course. But from that it came to mean flesh in contrast to God.

So God is not flesh. What is God? God is a spirit. He's not flesh.

[19:10] He is spirit. Man is flesh. And flesh came to mean in the Bible humankind in contrast to God. Humanity in its frailty and its weakness and its mortality.

Humanity in its liability to aging and decay and suffering and dying. Flesh in the Bible is what fades and perishes in the passing of time.

In other words, flesh is the opposite of God. And it says here, can you see in verse 14, the word became flesh.

Do you remember how Jesus said this? He said, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Isaiah says, all flesh is like grass that withers, that fades.

Flesh fades like the flower of the grass. The apostle Paul says, flesh and flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Flesh is mankind, humankind in its weakness and frailty.

[20:23] And John says here that the word, who was everything that God is, became flesh. That is, he became everything that man is, which is everything that God is not.

The word was everything that God was, became everything that God was not. Flesh. He who was one with his father in his divinity became one with us in our humanity.

That's the miracle of the incarnation. God became man. The word became flesh. He was human physically. He was born in the usual way.

Nothing unusual but his birth. He was not conceived in the usual way. But he was born in the usual way. He cried. And he cried.

Jesus cried and he grew in stature. He was one of us. All babies cried. Babies don't cry, they're not human. He was hungry and he was thirsty.

[21:34] The Lord Jesus had to sleep and he was tired. He knew what it was to sweat. He knew what it was to bleed. He suffered real pain. died a real death.

He became flesh physically. He was human emotionally. He experienced the emotional pain of being betrayed. He knew the pain of what it was to be misunderstood.

The pain of having his friends forsaken him. experienced sorrow and he was bereaved. He wept real tears. He was a man. And intellectually he was human. He had to ask questions to find out the answer.

He had to be taught how to talk. The internal words had to be taught by his mum and dad how to talk. They were really thrilled that day weren't they?

They were really thrilled when Joseph came home from work one day and Mary said who is that? And Jesus said Abba Daddy his adopted father.

[ 22 : 41 ] Like every father he was pleased. Like every father is pleased when their child begins to talk and recognize him. The eternal word helps learn how to speak. The one who created the universe had to be taught by his father how to knock and nail in straight.

He was mad intellectually. He was mad morally. He was tempted. He struggled to keep his line in will with his father's will. He prays in the garden if it is possible for this cup to be taken from me. Not my will but your will be done. He was mad spiritually. Sometimes he felt so weak that he had to go to his heavenly father in desperate prayer in order to keep on. He felt the pain of being forsaken. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was mad. And the word was everything that God is became everything that we are apart from our sin. And this incredible act of self-humbling was irreversible. And we often forget that, don't we? It was irreversible. There was no going back from Bethlehem. There was no going back from being one with humanity.

[ 23 : 57 ] He's still a man's right. We've seen that in the last two weeks of the ascension. That Jesus is exalted at the right hand and he is still one of us. He is still a human being. There was no going back.

The wonder of the incarnation. Let me read to you from Thomas Brooks. He wrote this about 360 years ago. that Christ should come from the eternal bosom of his father to a region of sorrow and death.

That God should be manifested in the flesh. The creator made a creature. That he who was clothed with glory should be wrapped with rags of flesh.

He that filled heaven and earth with his glory should be cradled in a manger. That the power of God should fly from weak man. The God of Israel into Egypt.

That the God of the law should be subject to the law. The God of the circumcision circumcised. The God that made the heavens working at Joseph's homely trade.

[ 25 : 04 ] That he who binds the devils in chains should be tempted. That he whose is the world and the fullness thereof should hunger and thirst. That the God of strength should be weary.

The judge of all flesh condemned. The God of life put to death. That he that is one with his father should cry out of misery. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That he who had the keys of hell and death at his girdle should lie imprisoned in the sacral of another. Having his lifetime nowhere to lay his head, nor after death to lay his body, that the head before which the angels do cast down their crowns should be crowned with thorns.

And those eyes purer than the sun put out by the darkness of death. Those ears which hear nothing but hallelujahs of saints and angels to hear the blasphemies of the multitude.

That face that was fairer than the sons of man to be spit on by those beastly Jews. That faith and tongue that speak as never man speak accused for blasphemy.

[ 26 : 09 ] Those hands that freely swayed the scepter of heaven nailed to the cross. Those feet like under fine brass nailed to the cross for man's sins. Each sense annoyed.

His feeling or touching with a spear and nails. His smell with stinking flavour. Being crucified about Gold Gotham, the place of skulls, his taste with vinegar and gall, his hearing with reproaches.

And the sight of his mother and disciples bemoaning him, his soul comfortless and forsaken. And all this for those very sins that Satan paints and puts fine colours on.

His point is this really. It's a great book, precious remedies against Satan's devices. His point is that is what the incarnation cost the Son of God. The misview of the incarnation.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. And the word made his dwelling has literally pitched his tent. Tabernacle amongst us is a reference to the wilderness where God dwelt amongst his people in a tent, a portable travelling sanctuary, a tent.

[ 27 : 24 ] And that tent, that tabernacle was filled with the glory of God. The glory of God came and filled the tabernacle. And that was the sign that God had taken possession of his tent. That would be the place where Israel encountered God.

It would be where sacrifice was offered. It would be where prayer was made. But it was just a shadow. A temporary shadow. And John is saying that here now, Jesus is now God with us.

God dwells in our midst not in a tent or temple but in a person. In a manifesting Emmanuel God with us. And he is where we encounter God now. The word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us and we saw his glory.

John was an eyewitness. I saw it. John was there at the cross. He saw the blood and the water flowing from the crucified one.

We saw his glory, said John. It is a story that people have made up. John was there. So what does this wonderful truth of the incarnation say to us? It says that God has spoken.

[ 28 : 33 ] That the ultimate communication from God to this world life. He spoke before him and he spoke creation into being let there be light and there was light. He spoke his words to the prophets, to Moses, but in Jesus the word, everything that God had to say, everything that God possibly could communicate of himself is in Jesus the word become flesh.

And so Jesus is God's full and final word. And so what can we say about the incarnation? Three things to be closed. What does incarnation teach us?

It first of all teaches us affirmation. Affirmation. It's an affirmation of the value of humanity. The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

Even though humanity is sinful and his, even though humanity is fallen, God assumed humanity.

And what a compliment to humanity what an affirmation of the value of human beings to God.

Second thing is identification. God identifies with humanity. He became flesh, suffering, dying, flesh. He identified with us in our suffering and the difficult lives that we live.

[ 29 : 56 ] He came and lived a difficult life with us. Affirmation, identification, and lastly, salvation. It's not the incarnation that saves us.

It's not. Jesus doesn't save us by becoming a human being. But the incarnation was that first wonderful step.

The first awesome step that the words took in order for him to die for us. he became flesh.

And what happens to flesh? Flesh dies. And flesh suffers. And he came to suffer and die for us, for our sins.

Salvation and adoration. And so the call is this, oh come let us adore him. who is he on yonder store?

[ 30 : 59 ] At his feet, the shepherds fall. Tis the Lord, isn't it? The King of glory. Tis the Lord, oh wonder story.

At his feet we humbly fall. Crown him, crown him Lord of all. And yet the dark side to Christmas is John talks about in the preface.

The sad truth is that mankind has largely rejected the word. The light has shone into the darkness. In all his glory but men love darkness rather than light.

People love the darkness and as soon as the light comes into the world they scurry away. It's like lifting up a rock in the garden at the moment and you see the bugs scamper back to the past.

And Jesus has come into this world and he shone his light into the world and God has spoken.

What is the effect of mankind? Creatures don't like it. But to those who receive him, to those who come to the light, to those who believe in his name, to those who hear his word, who respond to the word in faith, he gave the power to become children of God.

[ 32 : 21 ] And those who receive Jesus are born again as God's children. And that can happen to you tonight. Let's pray.